

System Configuration Team Meeting

February 16, 2006

1. Greetings and Introductions.

The February System Configuration Team meeting was chaired by Bill Hevlin. The following is a summary (not a verbatim transcript) of the topics discussed and decisions made at this meeting. Anyone with questions or comments about these notes should contact Kathy Ceballos at 503-230-5420.

2. FFDRWG and SRWG Updates.

Mark Smith said the most recent Walla Walla District FFDRWG meeting covered a lot of ground. Topics discussed included spring and summer juvenile survival evaluations at Lower Monumental, the timing of Little Goose RSW construction and the study design at that project for 2006 (30 percent spill with two treatments, spill pattern to be determined during a March 6-12 visit to the model center at Vicksburg). The next Walla Walla District FFDRWG meeting will be held on May 4-5.

Marvin Shuttles said SRWG is starting to work on the FY'07 program. Various subgroups will be meeting, including one to discuss adult salmon issues and lamprey; this meeting is scheduled for March 31. And this is the first step in determining FY'07 research needs? Hevlin asked. Correct, Shuttles replied – over the next several weeks, many more meetings will be scheduled.

3. Review of the Corps' Flood Control Study.

John Kranda said comments on the Corps' draft recon-level report on its proposed system flood control study are due by March 13 (*the due date on comments has recently been extended to March 31*). Is there a chance we could extend the comment period somewhat? Hevlin asked. I can certainly ask about that, Kranda replied, but time is somewhat tight if we want to get the report back to the committees in time to get this item into the FY'07 CRFM budget. The bottom line is that we would see a federal interest in going forward with a feasibility study, he said. You've heard the \$30 million price tag for looking at everything, comprehensively; it is likely that we would take a phased approach, looking at some of the less-costly alternatives first, as well as the potential biological benefits. In other words, Kranda said, it may not be necessary to

do the entire \$30 million study all at once. There would then be an interim report and an off-ramp, if it is decided not to pursue the full study. The team lead is likely to continue to lie with Seattle District. The bottom line is that, in this draft, the Corps is recommending to the committees that the feasibility study proceed, and that CRFM would be the most likely funding source.

Pat McGrane said Reclamation has reviewed the Corps' draft report; he said his main comment is that the report really doesn't say much of anything until the very end. The text seems to be out of order, he said – the most critical text is stuck at the end. Until you determine flood control risk, there is no way to determine whether the storage reservoirs can be held at a higher level through the winter. Without doing the necessary surveys of the dikes and levees, you can't do this study, he said – you leave the discussion of determining risk and conducting surveys to page 50 and beyond. I would add that the price is outrageous – I think you need an independent scientific review of the study elements and the cost, McGrane said.

The group discussed the need for the Corps flood control study, its funding impacts on the rest of the CRFM program and its relative importance, in terms of potential biological benefits, compared to other CRFM studies and actions. Under the new Congressional rules prohibiting multiyear projects, would the study all have to be funded in a single year? Shane Scott asked. No – that applies only to construction contracts to a single contractor, Kranda replied.

Should we address the relative priority of this study in our comments? Hevlin asked. Should we make an effort to analyze where it would rank against, say, actual construction items at the dams? I would say yes, and I would also take the opportunity to say whether or not you feel the CRFM program is the most appropriate source of funding for the study, Kranda replied.

The schedule laid out in the draft recon report includes a draft phase 1 report by March 2008, with a draft feasibility report and EIS available for public comment by 2012, Kranda said – in other words, it is a long-term study. Monte McLendon noted there are a number of technical errors in the statistics and authorizations included in the draft report; he suggested that Corps and Reclamation staff sit down to correct those. We also need to discuss the other “tentacles” of this study, which will include the effects of any changes to flood control operations on Reclamation and the other dam operators, he said.

After a few minutes of further discussion, it was agreed that this issue will be revisited at the March 2 IT meeting, and at future SCT meetings. Kranda reiterated that he will check to see whether the comment period on the draft recon-level report can be extended, and will report back to Hevlin once he has an answer. I have heard the comments indicating that some fairly fundamental corrections are needed to the current draft, and that another draft may be needed, Kranda said.

4. Little Goose RSW Schedule Issue (Report on IT Resolution).

Randy Chong said the Corps is currently looking at the resources needed to get rolling on the Little Goose RSW for a spring 2008 installation, in response to the direction received at this week's emergency IT conference call. The Corps was asked to investigate the impacts of this shift in available resources on other projects. At the same time, NOAA Fisheries was asked to provide information on the expected biological benefits of a 2008 RSW installation at Little Goose to Corps management; that analysis is currently underway, although Gary Fredricks cautioned that it is unrealistic for Corps management to expect specific, quantifiable estimates of, say, the precise increase in expected adult returns as a result of this change in schedule.

5. FY'07 CRFM Program.

To begin with the administration's FY'07 budget, said Kranda, the Office of Management and Budget has decided that CRFM and similar projects, while retaining their priority with the administration, rightly belong in the O&M, rather than the construction general, budget. What had been a \$95 million President's budget was accordingly moved over when presented to Congress. The funding level remained at \$95 million, but if you looked for it in the President's budget, you couldn't find CRFM as a line-item. What will eventually be provided to Congress will show that the \$95 million can be found broken up amongst the eight FCRPS dams, Kranda said – that's the way the O&M budget is presented. There are rules governing the exchange of funds between projects, which we haven't had to deal with before, he added.

Projects that are specific to a dam can be found in the funding for that dam, Kranda continued. Systemwide projects have been equitably allocated among the eight projects. I have no idea, at this point, how this will be handled, he said; my understanding is that CRFM is still viewed as an ESA responsibility and a high priority for this administration. There is some indication that the CRFM funds will remain "fenced" from the rest of the O&M budget, but we're just going to have to see how it all shakes out next year, Kranda said.

You're saying that you're not sure the FY'07 CRFM budget will be split out specifically among the eight FCRPS projects, but you also can't say for sure that it won't be? David Wills asked. Correct, Kranda replied. Part of the logic of moving it to O&M had to do with the administration's idea that the CG program should be for new projects only, not for rehabbing or modifying existing projects, he explained. Putting those types of projects into the O&M budget provides a truer reflection of the operating costs of those existing projects. The devil will be in the details of how the O&M budget is allocated, and how many restrictions there are on how the \$95 million FY'07 CRFM budget can be spent – at this point, we just don't know how this is going to affect implementation. It sounds as though this could prove a real flexibility problem, in terms of our ability to re-allocate funds between dams, Hevlin observed.

Kranda then distributed copies of the most recent FY'07 CRFM worksheet, dated February 16. Hevlin distributed copies of the most recent CRFM prioritization criteria. It's now time to begin the FY'07 CRFM prioritization process, Hevlin said; I thought it might be helpful to begin by revisiting the prioritization criteria we agreed to use last year. The group devoted a few minutes of discussion to the criteria and the FY'07 prioritization process, offering a few clarifying questions and comments. Hevlin noted that the Power Planning & Conservation Council has recently expressed an interest in the SCT prioritization criteria; in particular, whether the group is taking cost effectiveness into account in its deliberations. There was general agreement that cost effectiveness is one of the criteria the SCT takes into account. On a related topic, Hevlin noted that the Council still has a vote within the SCT prioritization process, if they choose to send a representative.

Hevlin said the next step in the SCT prioritization process is to come to agreement on the prioritization criteria to be used in FY'07. We also need to discuss our overall goals for the FY'07 CRFM program, he said. Kranda noted that the BiOp remand process will likely have a significant impact on FY'07 CRFM priorities; we won't know what those impacts are likely to be until the remand is somewhat further along, he said.

Ultimately, Hevlin asked that the SCT – both members and participants – provide any comments they may have on the prioritization criteria to him within the next two weeks, by March 2. Once the criteria are finalized, the SCT will split into federal and non-federal caucuses to apply the criteria and develop individual group rankings. Once that process is complete, the full SCT will re-convene to reconcile the two, and to develop a single, combined ranked list of FY'07 CRFM projects.

It was agreed that the SCT will finalize its prioritization criteria at the group's March meeting; it was further agreed that the group will suggest any additional CRFM projects they feel should be funded at the March meeting. The prioritization process will then begin in April or May.

6. Next SCT Meeting Date.

The next meeting of the System Configuration Team was set for Thursday, March 16. Meeting summary prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor. It was agreed that the May 18 SCT meeting will include a field trip to allow the SCT and WQT to observe the Chief Joseph flow deflectors and Ice Harbor RSW in operation, as well as a potential site visit to one or more Mid-C projects. The May 18 meeting would likely be held at or near Ice Harbor Dam.